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NIH Working Groups on African American English (AAE)

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Missing Agreement: Where is it Dialect and Where Deficit?

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Missing Agreement: Where is it Dialect and Where Deficit

From work by: T. Roeper, E. Ramos, L. Abdul-karim, H. Seymour
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I. Can we define "Possible Disorder" in UG?

1. Deficit = deviance unlike a Delay
2. Missed Formal Feature Hypothesis
= Premature fixation of lexical item

II. Missed Formal Features and Normal Lexical acquisition

- A. Why does normal child not say: "Me can do it"
=> learn Nominative => change to "I can do it"
- B. Normal Child: Maximize Formal Features
 - 1) I saw the boy => [the: +sing, +masc, +def, +acc]
ich sah den Mann
 - 2) The girls arrived => delete: ,masc, sing, acc
German: no change (den => correct (idealized))
- C. Normal acquisition of Modal:
can => modal meaning => Understood before used
search for Tense, Agr, Case, Selection properties
"John can sing" => no case information
 1. Constraint on Normal Acquisition:
Do not insert item into grammar until all domains checked
- D. Deficit Grammar: fix item in grammar without AGR or CASE
- E. Dialect: AGREEMENT present as Universal Grammar Option
=> Check each domain separately
=> AAE requires nominative in "I can sing"
AGR carried by Modal

"categories lacking interpretability should be disallowed" (Chomsky (1998))

- a. Conclusion: [-interpretable] => Formal Features (AGR, Case)

E. . General Hypothesis: Fix lexical item without [-Interpretable features]

1. In productive grammar => No Retreat
(Clahsen, Vainikka, Eisenbeiss (1994))

III. Case-Study: Missed Formal Features

- A. AGR = FF not a node

Hypothesis: missing in NP "two lobster"
and IP at same time "Daddy like"

Munn (to appear, LI): Genitive = Agreement morpheme "them eyes"

B. JC 4.4-46yrs (Ramos and Roeper (1994))

3) That why them put a lot of sand in (Note: CP-why) Genitive (in NP-of):

4) Me Daddy like mustard
Me sister name Dawn
He family. He lost he family
He shovelled him truck
Them Mom could let them play outside

5) Nominative (in IP):
Me like ketchup
Me don't know
Me said me gotta hurry up
Her can cook something
Them have a party

6) Discourse: "Me sister name Dawne. Her give me Dad a lobster, a two lobster,
Me Mom put in here, cook them, forgot to take them eyes out.
and then it give it to Mom He say put it down. And then her say ahh, and then her put on
the floor, and we scare her.. Her say, ahh it's moving, and then them cook them up, and it
swcared Mom, so we gonna put him to trouble. And then he be trouble....you can't eat eyes.
Only you can eat skin. And me did eat it. "

We find occasional nominatives here, but wide-ranging absence of agreement in both verbal and nominal contexts.

While in normal acquisition the emergence of agreement and other Formal Features happens so quickly, it is difficult to separate out which factors are independent, we find that there is ample evidence for other kinds of complex syntax, while precisely agreement phenomena remain unmastered.

Evidence for the presence of Inflectional information can be seen in these cases:

Me can have this
her can cook something
it don't have a mouth
then me no have to go bath
it can poke somebody
me don't have a cat on a bed
Only you can brush your teeth very good
No her can put up here
I see he shadow....I can make see my shadow

In addition just the kinds of structures associated with raising over negation are found:

Me never have them real big
Me never take a shower

There are also extensive examples of CP-level phenomena:

When me go outside to play, me go like that
 that because them Mom don't let them
 that why them put a lot of sand
 Why him don't have eyes
 when him crack tiny pieces up, and then put (unintelligible)
 why her need this
 what's I talking about
 I don't know where her can cook

In addition other signs of complex syntax co-exist with the absence of agreement.
 For instance, the presence of reflexivization:

her standing and her see herself

Also there is evidence of wh-movement and Operator-movement:

lobster to eat for lunch
 I don't know what he saying
 What's I talking about

Some of these sentences show evidence of Agreement as well, although it is absent in the majority of cases. The mixture can be analyzed along the lines of multiple grammars advocated by Roeper (to appear) and Yang (1999), which has been argued for the history of English as well by Kroch and Taylor (). The crucial point is that there are clear absences of agreement while other features are present, arguing for their independent representation.

A broad picture of ten recordings can be found in these

7) 10 weekly recordings:

- a. 386 instances had "me" as possessive in 56% of cases,
- b. "them" 100%
- c. "he" 60%, "him" 40%.

7) Comprehension experiment: Choose

[picture of me painting] [picture of my bucket of paint]

"the girl saw me paint"

"the girl saw my paint".

5/10 instances, "me paint" interpreted as "my paint"

C. Prediction: If "can" = [-case]], Nom => [-case]

a. Anecdotal Evidence: "I sure" or "I" = default (T. Wyatt)

Background: Abdul-Karim (1994) "who has a hat"

=> me (2yrs)

=> "I do" (2 3/4 yrs)

=> *"I" never

b. Symmetry: can=> does not project Case

I => does not receive Case

Conclusion:

1. not simply mispronunciation of "my" as "me"

2. Not a Choice of AGR or Tense (Wexler (1998) for normals)
3. Supports Chomsky's semantic view of categories
4. AGR = a FF in NP and IP
5. Deficit: fix FF of lexical items without [-interpretable] FF
(see deVilliers and Johnson (1999))

IV. Searching for AGR: Relational PP as Deletable AGR-element

Disordered: (Seymour and Roeper (1994)

Subjects: 17 Disordered Children

1. How did the mother decide to sweep?

"with a broom" 121 cases

"broom" 26 cases

Normal children: rare deletion of "with"

A. Lexical level => Compounds

Incorporation => Relational Prep deletion (Roeper and Siegel (1978))

1. made at home => home-made
2. made by hand => hand-made
3. made in a factory => factory made
4. eaten by moths => moth-eaten
5. eaten with a fork => *fork-eaten

6. swept with a broom => broom swept (instrument "with")

Compare: swept with a friend => *friend-swept (accompaniment "with")

Lexical Prepositions:

1. go through tunnel => *tunnel-gone
2. found around flowers => *flower-found
3. stand beside the barn => *barn-stood

B. Discourse Level Deletion

1. Default case

- a. Who has a hat? Me

*me has a hat

2. Prep deletion

- a. where do you live? San Francisco

*I live San Francisco

- b. where are you going? Detroit

*I am going Detroit

- c. when are you playing chess? noon

*I am playing chess noon

3. Non-deletable:

- a. when did it seem odd to you? *night
at night

- b. how are you playing? *bat
with a bat
- c. How did you get to the other side of the river *tunnel
*I went to the other side the tunnel
through the tunnel
- d. why was the game cancelled *accident
because of an accident
- e. where does it hurt? *stomach
in my stomach
*in stomach
- f. where did you put it? *arm
*on arm
on my arm

C. Bresnan (1989): Cross-linguistic arguments about unmarked locative
Klein (1992) Extensive study of L2 Prep-deletion

D. Conclusion: Discourse, Lexical levels => deletability
Syntactic level => non-deletable
Explanation: syntax requires case-assigner
Lexical: incorporation requires no case
Discourse: not clear

V. Early Child Relational-Prep Deletion (Brennan (1991))

- A. we colored crayon (=with)
Shirley get meat dinner (=for)
I cut it a knife (=with)
Richard bring snack Shirley (=for)
I went party (=to)
feed baby fork (=with)
Shirley cut fork (=with)
I sleep big bed (=in)
Save some later (=for)

Some children will use argument PP's:

- B. I played with Joan
Jim was at Cooperstown
putting Daddy in wagon

46 prepositions for arguments,
3 for adjuncts for three children.

Brennan:

"3 of 4 children studied, it was true that adjuncts never surfaced with PP's,"

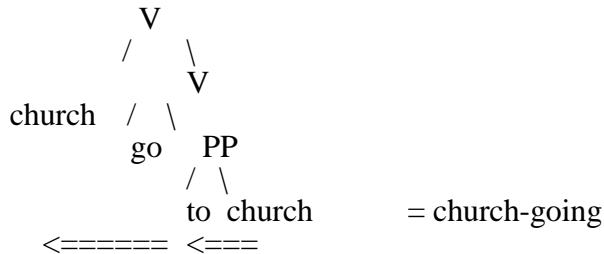
- C. Hypothesis: Verb carries LOC selection, Prep agrees with it
 - a. John runs => NP[+sing] => V[+sing] via Agree

Relational Prep = Agreement between

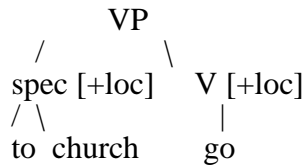
VERB PREP
[+loc] [+Loc]

D. Representations:

Head-Complement Selection:

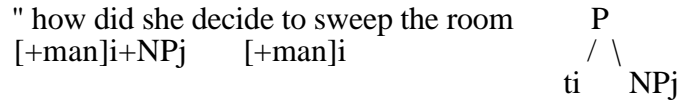


Kayne (1994) Adjuncts = Specs => Spec-Head Agreement



[+loc] is present on the verb itself=> Prep-loc = AGR marker, deleteable

E. Disordered Perspective: all AGR of the same type =FF



Child assumption: how = verb [man+] P[+man]
Agreement

VI. Is Concord Agreement? No, a totally different system that may be more available

- a. feetses
- b. I don't got none

VII Conclusion:

- a. Defined notion of "Possible Trigger" in UG
- b. Defend AGR as FF
- c. Unified theory of Agreement => Relational-Prep = Agreement
- d. Predicts: deletion of AGR in IP,DP, and VP for disorder
- e. AAE: deletion in DP, IP,VP of number agreement, case
retention: case agreement in IP = Nominative
- f. Conclusion: (Wyatt) Nominative Agreement is a better marker
for disorders in AAE
- g. Conclusion: Possibility that AGR as a formal Feature could be
missing as a defect of UG